Three Things Every New Flatbed Driver Should Know

Hauling flatbed loads, also known as ‘flatbedding’, is a unique kind of trucking that is different from hauling reefers and dry fans in many ways. The biggest difference is in how loads are secured. As any flatbed trucker will tell you, it comes down to tarps, straps, and bungee cords. And it’s up to the driver to make sure his or her load is properly secured.

If you are new to the practice of hauling flatbed loads, there are some important things you need to know. Yes, there is typically more money involved when comparing flatbeds with dry vans and tankers. However, there is also more responsibility as well. Drivers are required to adhere to all federal and state guidelines for load securing on every trip. Furthermore, both shippers and receivers expect drivers to deliver cargo completely undamaged. It is not always as easy as it might sound.

Here are three important things every new flatbed driver should know:

1. Federal Regulations

In 2002, the federal government revamped their regulations for cargo securement. The regulations now cover everything from lumber to steel coil to intermodal containers. New flatbed drivers need to take the time to become familiar with these regulations in order to ensure compliance. Experienced drivers recommend downloading a digital copy of the regulatory guidebook from the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) and keeping it as a reference material.

The regulations clearly explain how tarps, straps and other securements are to be used safely. Experienced drivers say flatbedders should use as many tarps and securements as necessary to keep a load as tight as possible. If you are ever concerned a load might be too loose, use more. It is easy to have a load that is too loose; you can never have a load that is too tight.

2. Tarping a Load

Applying a tarp, also known as 'tarping', is a skill that takes a lot of practice. New drivers will feel as if it is taking them forever just to get tarped and on the road. This is normal. Things should not be rushed, as moving too quickly is a recipe for forgetting something or being careless. The driver should take as long as is necessary to make sure loads are secured and tarps are providing proper protection. Tarping will get easier and faster with practice.

3. Checking the Load

The standard rule of thumb for new flatbed drivers is to check a new load within the first 50 miles of departure. Then continue checking every 150 miles thereafter. If corners are flapping, add an extra bungee cord or strap. If one of the straps seems loose, winch is down tighter. Never let something go under the false assumption that it is no big deal. Assume anything that is not as tight as it was the last time you checked as a potential problem.

Along the same lines, the flatbed driver should never stop on the shoulder to check a load unless it is an emergency. Stopping on the shoulder creates a dangerous situation that could result in tragic results. Instead, take the time to pull off at a truck stop or take the next exit and find a fuel station. The few extra minutes it takes could end up saving your life.

With enough runs under your belt, you will get used to using tarps and other securements with flatbed loads. Nevertheless, it takes time. Do not expect to be an expert after just a week or two. With every new load, there will be a new experience and something else to learn. It is part of flatbedding.

Source:

- http://flatbedtrucktarps.com/